

FORT ST. GEORGE MUSEUM

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SRI K. R. VIJAYARAGHAVAN, CURATOR

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Fort St. George Museum

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Fort Museum inside Fort St. George with Flag Mast, Secretariat and other buildings.

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IN February 1948, the Fort St. George Museum held its opening exhibition to coincide with the Fifth Session of the Central Advisory Board of Archaeology. The Museum was organised as a result of Fort St. George being declared a National Monument. The Museum was founded to house the relics and the movable antiquities associated with the Fort and its history. Since then there has been a steady addition to the initial collection which has enabled the Department recently to organise three new sections, so that the number of galleries has now increased from two to five.

The Museum is appropriately located in an ancient building facing the Bay of Bengal inside Fort St. George, occupying a prominent place among the important monuments inside the Fort. Along with the monuments the collection affords much scope for the study of the growth of this early British settlement and of the history of South India during the past three centuries.

The Museum is open on all days from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

History.

The Fort St. George Museum owes its origin to Lt.-Col. D. M. Reid, Commander of the late Madras Guards. Early in 1944 he suggested that on the eve of Indian Independence, the historic buildings inside Fort

St. George, including its fortifications should be protected under the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act and that a Museum should be established to house the connected relics. Though Fort St. George is not the earliest British settlement in India, it constitutes their first territorial acquisitions with the exception of the insignificant fort at Armagon, near Pulicat, which had been acquired a few years earlier in 1626. The British Infantry Officers' Mess Building was the obvious choice for locating the Museum and through Col. Reid's help all antiquities relating to the Madras Guards (disbanded in 1947) which had for a long time been stationed inside the Fort and St. Mary's Church, the oldest Anglican Church in the East, which was also the garrison church,

were transferred to this building. The then Governor of Madras (Sir Archibald Edward Nye) kindly presented the Regimental colours of the disbanded units, some mortars and porcelain pieces preserved in Government House. They were displayed in the Long Hall (first floor) and formed the general section of the Museum. With the consent and co-operation of the Superintendent, arms and armour relating to the period were transferred from the Government Museum, Madras, arranged in one of the halls of the ground floor to form the nucleus of the present "Hall of Arms". The Museum thus opened with these two galleries.

Building

The ancient building in which Museum is housed was constructed in

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General view of the "Hall of Arms".

Since 1861, the building became the Officers' Mess of the British Regiment stationed in the Fort. It is interesting to note that the first Light House of Madras was constructed on the top of this building, as early as 1796.

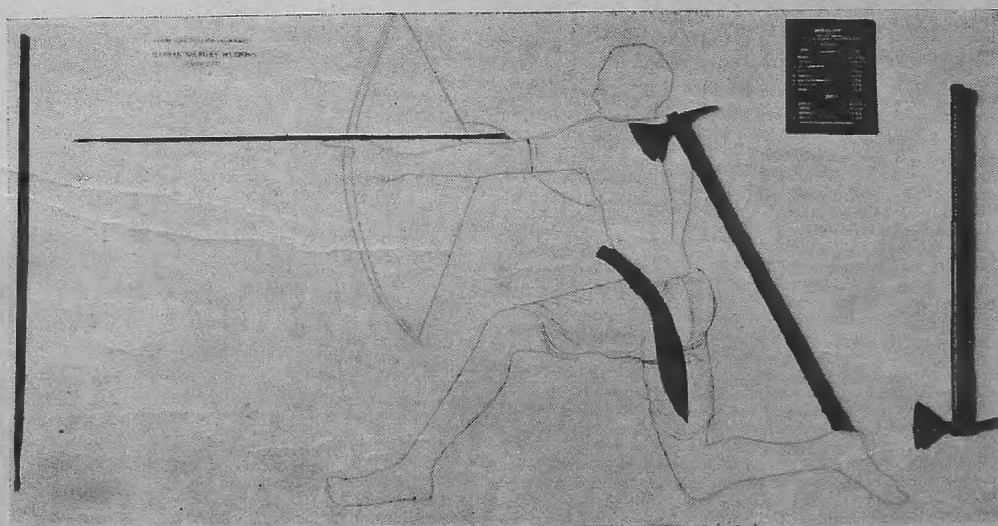
Hall of Arms

The history of artillery in India really begins in 1526, when Babur invaded North India from Kabul and defeated Ibrahim Lodi, the Sultan of Delhi at Panipet. Babur alone had cannon which he called his 'Feringhi Pieces' and his victory was mainly due to these weapons which till then were unknown in India. The early Indian guns were very crude, mostly of iron bars welded and bound by iron rings or iron cylinders with brass cast round them and the art of casting was not well established in this country before the middle of the 18th century. The Museum artillery piece illustrates some of these early types and more are to be seen on the Fort ramparts opposite the building.

This collection of arms and armour provides an attractive introduction to the historical relics of the Museum for they are peculiarly adaptable to effective display. Moreover this 18th century hall furnishes a most suitable contemporary background for these weapons of war, regimental colours, uniforms and paintings.

An effective innovation in the new display is the use of large size sketches to illustrate the handling of obsolete weapons. A large scale line-drawing of a 'Madras Soldier', with the actual

as the 'Exchange'. From the early days of this British settlement, the adjacent 'Sea Gate' was the general resort of the merchants. Through the efforts of Peter Massey Cassin, a free merchant of Madras, this separate was constructed near the shore where they could themselves expose their merchandise for sale by sample as is the custom in most trading cities in Europe. The lower part of the building was made shell-proof, according to the requirement of those days. The apartments in the ground floor were used at different times as the Auction Room, Subscription Library, and the Madras Bank. The 'Long Hall' on the first floor served successively as the 'Exchange', the Reception Hall and the Banqueting Hall.



"The Madras Soldier" before the formation of the Madras Army.

weapons that were used fixed to the body of the drawing in the positions in which they were carried presents the 'Madras Sepoy' before the formation of the Madras Army, when the 'Sepoys' used whatever weapons they could collect and dressed as they chose. The Madras Army was later reorganised into a well disciplined and properly organised force by Stringer Lawrence, who also commanded the East India Company's European forces. (His portrait is in the Long Hall on the first floor.) Along with this group of early weapons a list giving the ranks and scales of pay for European and Indian Officers and for other ranks is displayed. It is interesting to note that the rank of 'Major' was the highest in the Company's Army which was slowly to dominate the whole sub-continent. By the same method are illustrated the purpose and use of the 'Pike' and a sketch of a 'Pikemen in action' shows how the musketeers of the 18th and 19th centuries took shelter behind the Pikemen to protect themselves from the attack of the charging enemy cavalry when they had to pause for reloading their spent muskets.

Guns, grape-shots and other large objects stand free while small weapons such as daggers, knives and spear heads are displayed in cases. The daggers are so displayed that a visitor can view every portion clearly from hilt to point. Match-locks, flint-locks, percussion-locks and modern rifles are shown in historical sequence interspersed with a wide range of other unusual types illustrating the evolution.

Perhaps the pride of place in this section should be given to the graphic oil-painting depicting the 'Storming of Seringapatam', the famous engagement of 1799 which resulted in the death of Tipu Sultan and the annexation of the greater part of Mysore by Richard Wellesley. This was painted by Robert Ker Porter, immediately after the battle basing his work upon eye-witness accounts. In the picture can be seen many of the weapons displayed in this section actually in use. The painting is of interest in the study of the military uniforms also.

Prints Section

The Museum collection of 'Prints' began with a loan from the Madras

Government of over forty coloured engravings by the English artists Thomas and William Daniell. Recently some further views by the same artists were acquired from the Circuit House at Madura and to these were added aquatints from Coe. Ward's drawings purchased from a local collector. The Governor of Madras was also kind enough to present the Museum with some prints relating to Madras from the Government House collection. Many of the pictures are examples of finest work of these artists of the 18th century and the more recent acquisitions made the collection large enough to merit their separate display. A special gallery for the Prints was therefore opened in July 1954 next to the 'Hall of Arms'.

From the engravings and aquatints visitor gets a general idea of the historical range of the Museum. The exhibits start with early views of Fort St. George when the English factors and free merchants first settled in Madras in the days when the sea dashed against the fort walls within a few feet of the Musuem. The sea is now almost half a mile



Madras
Landing.
C.1850.

away. Next to these are displayed other views of the Fort, Black Town and St. Thomas Mount. The series ends with Tanjore, Madura, and Tinnevely, the southernmost town represented in our collection. The views exhibited are of considerable historical interest, perpetuating the authentic aspects of these places as they were, some two centuries ago.

In one of the Daniell's prints can be seen the colonnade constructed by Governor George Morton Pitt (1730-1735) extending from the sea gate of Fort St. George to the Fort Square supporting a terraced roof and forming a sheltered way from the sea gate. The thirty-two polished columns of black Pallavaram gneiss were carried off by the French in 1746 and set up in Pondicherry. After the fall of that place in 1761, they were brought back to Madras and re-erected in their original position. In 1910 the colonnade was dismantled to make room for the new Council Chamber in the construction of which the best preserved stones were incorporated to form the facade. Two other interesting and rare prints are the views of the Bay of Bengal almost touching the Fort, and British Officers and their

wives being helped to land and embark by the Madras fishermen. Since Madras had no natural harbour, the ships used to anchor at a distance and the merchants with their commodities had to reach the Fort in the small 'Masula' boats. These boats were fashioned in the same manner as to-day planks sewn together with coir twines, and caulked with coconut fibre.

The General Section

Antiquities such as coins, medals, porcelain, manuscripts, silverware and the 1820 model of Fort St. George are exhibited in two halls to the right as the visitor enters the Museum.

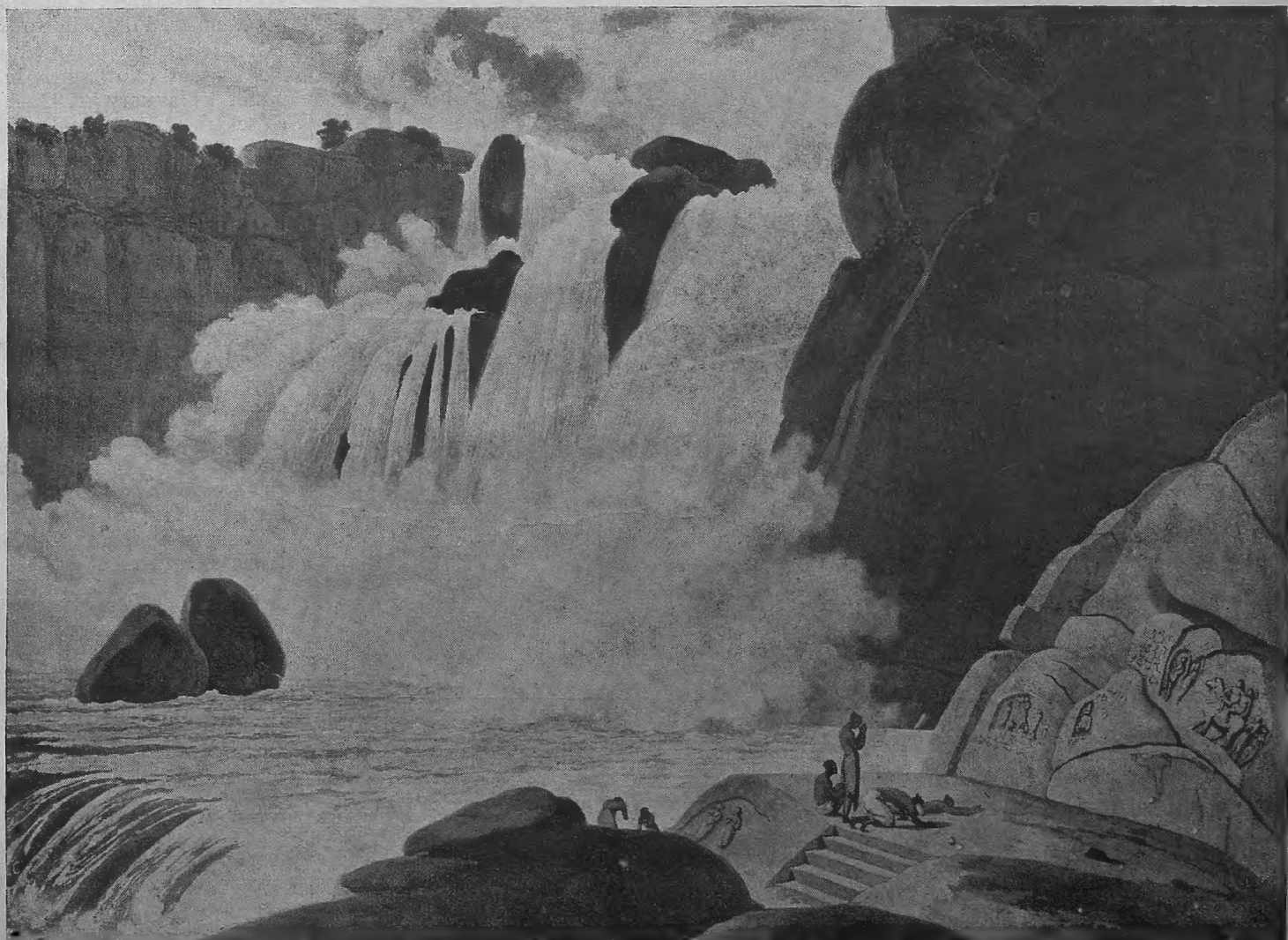
Coins.—The coin collections of the Fort Museum are spread out in two cases at the entrance. They represent most of the important South Indian issues during European period. The Madras Mint is as old as Fort St. George itself. The original grant of the Nayaks contained a provision that the Company could establish a mint of their own to strike coins. The Three Swami Pagoda (Gold) may be deemed as the first coin minted here. Gold Panam of an inferior alloy was also struck and were replaced by silver

Panams in 1688. This is the earliest date when silver coins began to be struck here. Silver Rupees came to be minted only after 1692. Till 1735 the Three Swami Pagoda (with Vishnu and his two consorts on the obverse and a granulated surface on the reverse) was the recognised coin of the Settlement. About this time a new Pagoda was introduced. This Madras Star Pagoda (with Vishnu and his consorts on the obverse and a granulated surface with a star of five rays on the reverse) was the official coin of the Company till 1807, when the 'Madras Rupee' became the standard currency. The copper coins were 'Cash' and 'Dudoo' or 'Dubbu'. Eighty cash went to form a Panam and ten a Dudoo. All these coins were abolished in 1835 when the coinage of British India was unified and standardised.

In addition a few coins minted in the Bengal and Bombay Presidencies and others struck by the other European powers such as the Portuguese, Dutch, French and Danes trading in South India, are also displayed.

East India Company Medals.—Early medals awarded by the East India Company to their officers and native Sepoys can be seen in a revolving

*Papanasam
Falls in
Tinnevely
District—
By Thomas
Daniell.*



show-case. This case was specially designed for the medals so that visitors might conveniently see both their obverse and reverse sides.

To the East India Company we owe the present system of awarding medals to every soldier who took part in a

campaign irrespective of his rank. Prior to this decorations were awarded only to principal commanders. The Company introduced several changes in the medallic art itself. All their awards were circular in shape while earlier ones were oval. Also it was the Company which originated the device of

engraving pictures of armed soldiers and stormed fortresses on their medals.

The ceremony of awarding medals was performed with due solemnity befitting the honour due to such worthy persons. They were paraded before the Governor, usually at Bombay and at times before the Court of Directors in London. The Company however had no authority to decorate regular officers and men of the King's Regiments.

The 'Seringapatam Medal' which was awarded for the successful storming of this stronghold of Tipu Sultan (painting displayed in the 'Hall of Arms') was the only Company Medal awarded to all soldiers whether of the King's Regiments or of the Company's. On the obverse side of the medal is represented the storming of the breach with the meridian sun denoting the time when the attack was begun. The medal was awarded in gold to high ranking officers, in silver gilt to Field Officers, and in silver to Captains and Subalterns, while the non-commissioned officers received bronze, and the privates tin medals. The Deccan Medal is the first East India Company award still extant. It was used for nearly all the major campaigns fought in the Deccan during the Governor-Generalship of Warren Hastings: Pollilore or Pullalur (September 1780), Porto Novo (July 1st, 1781), Sholingar (August 1718), Negapatam (November 1718), Trincomolin (January 1782), Coimbatore (November 1783), and the Treaty of Mangalore (March 1784).

The other important decorations displayed in this show-case are: (1) the Mysore Medal awarded for the Third Mysore War, won by the English over Tipu Sultan in 1792, under the Generalship of Lord Cornwallis, (2) the Egypt Medal of 1801, (3) the Ceylon Medal of 1803, (4) the Java Medal awarded in 1811 for the expedition led by Sir Samuel Auchmuty, the Commander-in-chief of Madras, accompanied by the Governor-General Lord Minto and (5) the Indian 'Mutiny'. The 'Mutiny' Medal in full had five bars for Delhi, Defence of Lucknow, Relief of Lucknow and Central India.

Porcelain.—The Company and Arcot porcelain pieces occupy on behalf of this hall. Most of them were manufactured at Canton (China) for the East India Company and the Nawabs of the Carnatic, according to designs sent



Major Stringer Lawrence and Muhammad Ali, Nawab of Carnatic, by George Chinnery.

by the Company. Some were made in Worcester by the Chamberlains of Worcester. The collections include fruit basket, vegetable and curry dishes, hot plates and oval plates. The Company pieces bear the Coat-of-Arms and motto of the East India Company and the inscribed Arcot pieces give details about the Nawabs and Begums for whom they were made and the year of manufacture.

Silverware.—The visitor now enters the next room which also forms part of the 'General Section'. The inscribed silver communion vessels displayed in a wall case originally belonged to three of the oldest churches in South India: St. Mary's Church in Fort St. George, Tranquebar Zion Church and Pulicat Church. St. Mary's Church, inside the Fort St. George was constructed by the tireless efforts of Governor Streymsam Master (his portrait can be seen on the first floor), the architect was William Dixon, on whom as chief gunner all engineering duties devolved. The church, consecrated on the 28th of October 1680, is the oldest Anglican Church in the East. The collection of inscribed silver communion vessels, numbering fourteen in all, consists of alms dishes, flagons, cups and a chalice. It includes an alms dish or plate presented by Governor Elihu Yale (1687-1692) and bears his name and arms engraved. His name has been perpetuated by the now famous Yale University in the United States of America. (His portrait is also exhibited in the 'Portrait Gallery'.) He was born at Boston and on retirement gave the largest donation in the form of books and pictures which realised £560 for the Collegiate School of Connecticut, during its early days. The authorities, in gratitude, named the school Yale College, which later developed into the Yale University.

Records and Manuscripts.—Nearby can be seen the two registers of St. Mary's Church recording baptisms, marriages and burials in the church. They form complete records from 1680 to 1786, except for the short interval between 1746 and 1749, when the fort was under the French. Elihu Yale, who had donated fifteen pagodas for the construction of the church was the first to be married here. Another noteworthy marriage solemnised in the church was that of Robert Clive with

Margaret Maskeyline (13th February 1753) by the famous priest, Fabricious.

Other manuscript records are exhibited in a revolving show-case nearby, and include original letters written by Lord Pigot, Robert Clive, Arthur Wellesley (later Duke of Wellington), Lord Cornwallis, Lord Bentinck and

others. In addition to these letters, there are two plans, one of which is that of Plassey as drawn by Clive before that famous engagement. In the next case can be seen the visitors book of St. Mary's Church which records the autograph of George V and Victoria Mary. The King signed himself "George P" (George Prince) since



Sir Arthur Havelock by Ravi Varma and Raja Raja Varma.

he came to Madras in 1906 as Prince of Wales. It was after this visit that Black Town was named George Town.

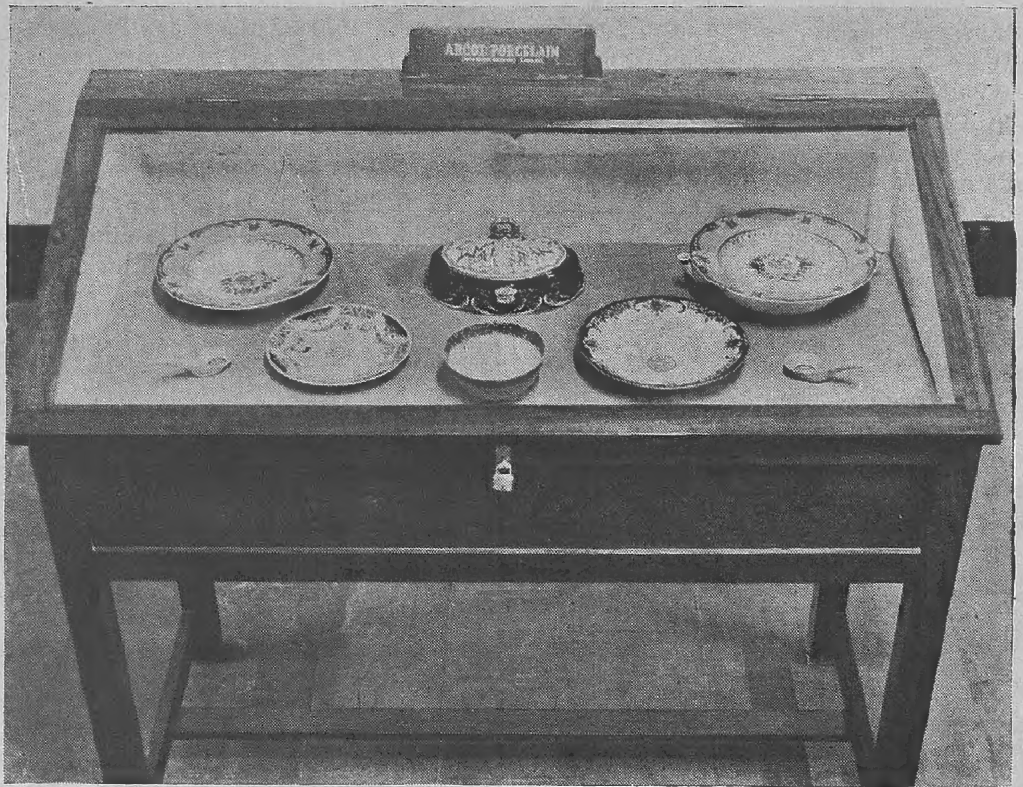
The Model of Fort St. George.—At the northern end of the same hall can be seen the large-scale wooden model of Fort St. George, which was displayed formerly in the room opposite St. Mary's Church. It represents the fort as it was between 1820 and 1865. During the 18th century the palanquin was the chief mode of conveyance. The number of bearers and attendants depended upon the status of the individual. From the contemporary views in the Prints Section we can have a graphic idea of the different types of palanquins used and how they were carried.

Marble Statue

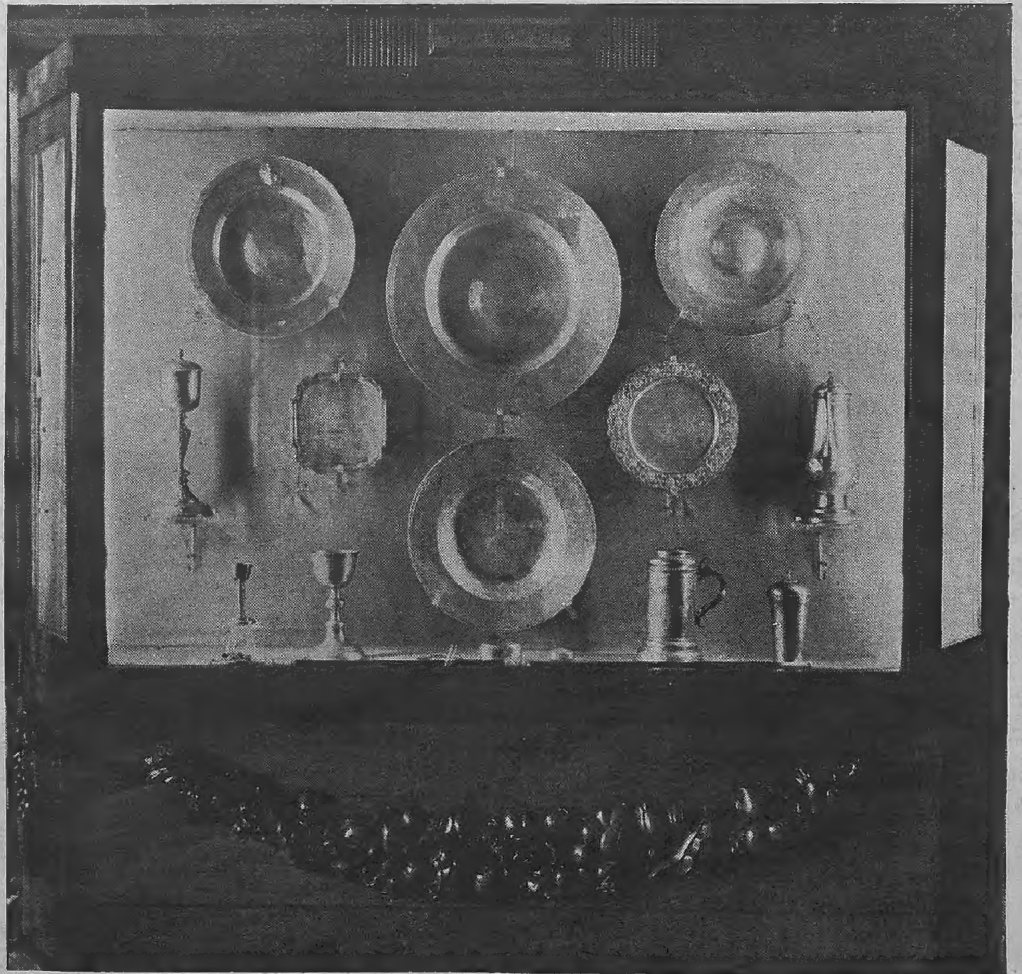
The huge statue of Lord Cornwallis greets the visitor as he approaches the steps leading to the first floor. It is a unique piece of workmanship by the famous British sculptor Thomas Banks. This fine sculpture, which was sent to India in 1800, represents the Governor-General in the robes of a peer over military uniform. On the cylindrical pedestal in bas-relief can be seen Lord Cornwallis receiving as hostages the two sons of Tipu Sultan, Princes Abd-ul-Kilak and Musa-ud-Din, boys of ten and eight years respectively in accordance with the treaty signed on the 15th of March 1792, at the end of the Third Mysore War. Figures of the Angel of Peace and Britannia adorn the other two sides; the fourth side carries an inscription describing the erection of this statue to commemorate the visit of Lord Cornwallis to Madras.

The Portrait Gallery

The only section on the first floor is the 'Portrait Gallery', which is the latest addition to the Museum and was opened in March 1956. It owes its existence to the generosity of Shri Sri Prakasa, Governor of Madras, who presented all these large paintings in oil to the Fort Museum from Raj Bhavan, Guindy and Ootacamund. Herein are the portraits of men and women, who made history during the last three centuries. Apart from the few Kings and Queens of England and the early Governors of Madras, the collection includes some portraits of the Nawabs of the Carnatic. They



Arcot porcelain (18th century).



Silver communion vessels of the 17th and 18th centuries from St. Mary's Church (Madras), Pulicat Church and Tranquebar Church.

are also works of well-known British artists such as Thomas Day, Samuel Scot, Francis Grant, George Hayter and Allan Ramsay.

Historically speaking, the most important paintings in this hall are those of King George III and Queen Charlotte. These portraits by Allan Ramsay were the first sent by the East India Company to their settlements in the East and they reached Madras between 1762 and 1767. The portraits of Stringer Lawrence, Muhammad Ali, Robert Clive and Queen Victoria feature frequently in popular history books. The installation of Nawab Ghulam Muhammad Ghaus Khan in 1842 by Lord Elphinstone, Governor

of Madras is another painting adorning the wall of this hall. This is one of the few original historical paintings of this period still existing. Frederick Christian Lewis painted it in 1842.

The portrait of Sir Arthur Havelock by Ravi Varma and his brother Raja Varma is of great local interest, as Ravi Varma was one of the few really great Indian portrait painters and his younger brother and collaborator received his training from him. Sir Arthur stands on a verandah of Government House, his body turned slightly to the right. His right hand remains unoccupied while his left, concealed by the robe, rests on his hip. He wears full diplo-



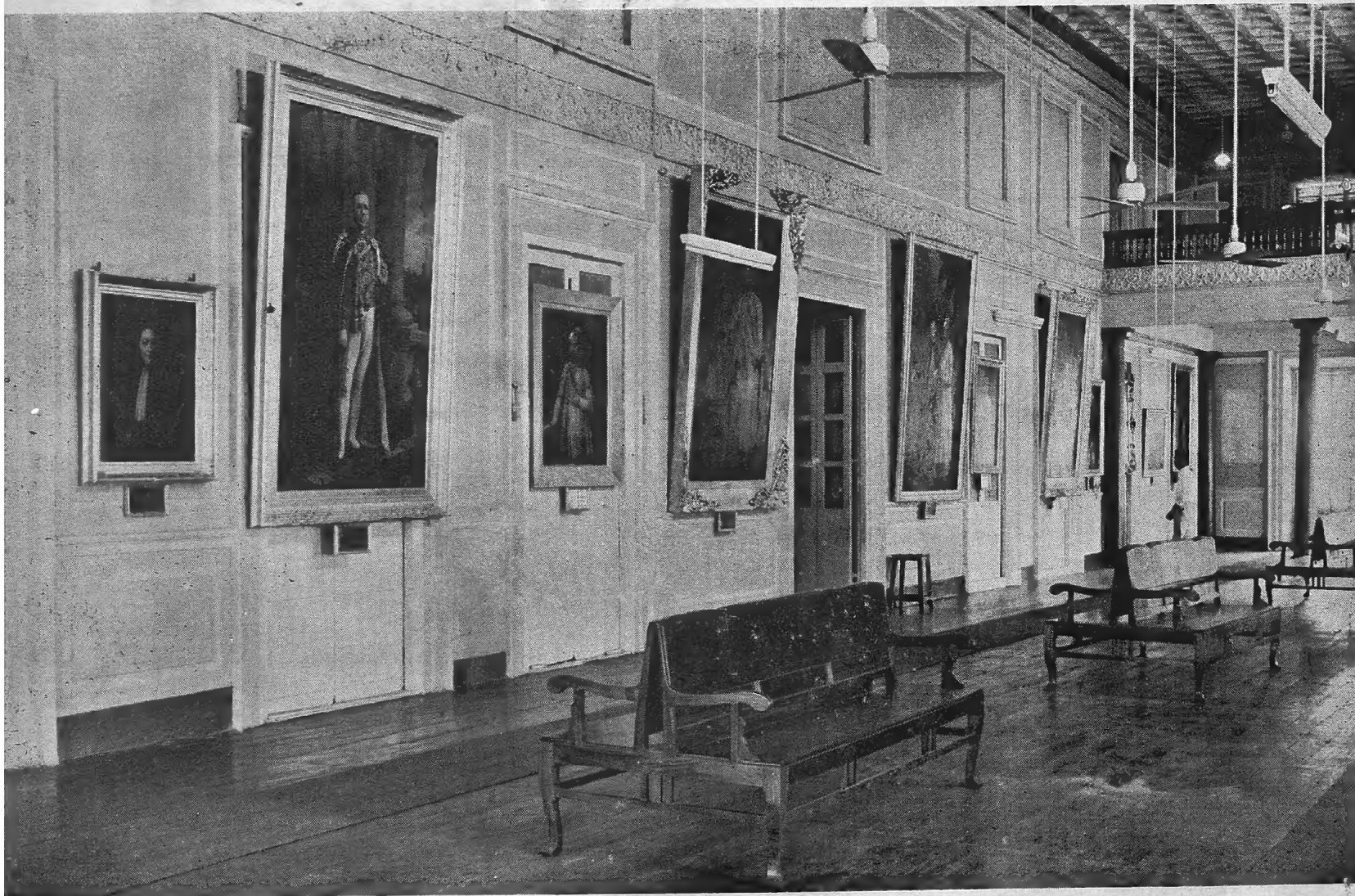
East India Company porcelain of the 18th century.



Marble statue of Lord Cornwallis by Thomas Banks.

matic dress with sword. On the left of the picture is a gilt chair and towards the right is a verandah-column on a square pedestal.

The coffered ceiling and ornamental dado, the glazed bay-windows with wooden balustrades of this 'Long Hall' forms an appropriate setting for these contemporary paintings. A tablet to commemorate Sah Gopal Das, who played such a large part in the economic affairs of the South has been appropriately erected in this hall, for so long the Company's Exchange and Bank, by his direct and lineal descendant Shri Sri Prakasa, Governor of Madras.



General view of the Portrait Gallery.



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